

Everything's Fine by playfulelectrodes

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Summary: Everything's fine, at least that's what El and Will keep telling themselves. It's now Junior year, and nothing has happened since the closer of the gate. When Max wants to throw a party at her house, El struggles to figure out how to be independent and normal. While Will finds his own way to say that everything's going to be okay. But is everything going to fine, or will something

Everything's Fine

El braced herself, because she knew Mike was about to be mad and there was nothing she could do about it. She watched him look at her, processing the words that had just come out of her mouth. She could see his gears moving quickly, letting his eyes slightly gaze over.

"What do you mean you can't come Saturday?" He asked sitting on his basement sofa. "Max has been planning this for like a month, she's going to kill you if you're not there." Max was having a party. Her parents would be out of town visiting California for the weekend, which meant the geek squad was going to try their hand at the cool thing, and throw a crazy high school party.

"I just," El looked for the words, as she stood with her mouth slightly open. She couldn't go to the party, because she really didn't want to, but she didn't want to tell him that. They were all excited to do the classic high school thing; get to drunk and black out like everyone else. "I just, feel like it would be best if I didn't show up." Mike squinted his eyes at her.

"Do you feel uncomfortable?" He asked, standing to get eye level with her again. "El, we'll be there, I'll be there so you don't have to worry. Plus it's not just random people; it's everyone you go to school with." El sighed, feeling overwhelmed at the thought of so many people crowding her, and the music; it would be so loud.

El could feel her checks going red. Embarrassment; she hadn't felt it until she had really started school. When she had walked into Hawkins High and watched everyone stare at her as she walked down the halls for the first time. Now into their junior year she had felt it very often; when she didn't understand a reference in class, when people asked her about her family and she didn't know what to say, when people laughed at her because Emily Berman poured strawberry milk down her top sophomore year.

"People find me awkward," she said with a fake airy laugh which quickly faded. "I mean, I am awkward, and what if someone tried to talk to me and I can't understand them with everything else going on. What if something happens and Hop finds out, then I like lift the

couch off the floor and I can't control myself," she took in a gulp of air.

"Hey," Mike said running his hand up and down her arm. "You're thinking about it too much. That's what I'm there for. I'll keep an eye on you and make sure no one does anything stupid." El looked up at him, their eyes boring into one another. "Plus Hopper knows you're going to be at Max's, maybe just say you didn't know she would be throwing a party." She thought about that comment, would she be in trouble with that lie? "Plus," Mike continued, "Will is really excited to do something normal for once. If he's going to Max's and you're not Hopper is going to find that weird and start asking you questions." She rolled her eyes, backing up slightly out of his arms.

"I'll think about it," she said grabbing her shoes that sat next to the basement door. He gave her a small smile, grabbing her backpack for her and walking it over to the door.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I shouldn't pressure you to do something you don't want to do. I'm just excited to finally be normal for once; I just want you to feel the same."

"I do," she said quickly. "I really do, I just don't want to get to comfortable and then have something happen." Mike nodded his head and frowned. "I don't know, maybe it will be fun and I'm just thinking too much." Mike got closer; helping her put on his old back pack he had given her. He gave her a kiss on her cheek.

"I'll see you tomorrow." He opened the door, the sun hanging over the horizon, causing the sky to turn a peach color. "But you have to be the one to tell Max you're not going to be there, I don't want to be eaten alive by the monster." They both smiled to one another before El picked up her bike, pushing it up Mikes back yard to get to the street.

It had been a while since anything had really happened, she was going to be seventeen soon and sometimes she was able to forget about all those days locked in cold dark room, being held in a tank filled with salt water, her nose running red from blood. She still had nightmares, but as the days, and months, and now years went by, it got easier to sleep at night and forget.

It was a fifteen minute bike ride from Mike's house to her own, where she and Hopper had moved to before sending her to school a little over a year ago. They had moved in with the Byer's. Hop's and Joyce's relationship still a frustrating mystery to Will and herself. They didn't share a room, but some nights it seemed like they were a true family, like Joyce and Hopper really had something going on behind closed doors.

She threw her bike onto the front lawn, stomping up the steps of the long porch of their old two story farm house. She let the screen door slam as she walked through the front door, Will jumping at the noise from the floor of the living room. He had sketches spread out on the carpet, a few sitting in a pile next to him.

"Still trying to find the right ones?" she asked, throwing her bag at the front door and closing it.

"If I put one bad one in it could ruin my chance," he said in a said voice.

"I guess it's good that none of them are bad." She said sitting in front of his drawings across from him.

"What do you think?" he said grabbing a sketch of a tall monster, wings spreading out behind it. "Or," he said picking up a traditional scenic drawing, "just keep it simple?"

"I say go with that guy," she said pointing to the monster. "You want them to know you, not bore them to death." He gave a slight laugh putting the monster into the stack of drawings. "So, I wanted to talk to you about something," she said as he went back to looking at the papers in front of him.

"If you're backing out of this party I will kill you," he said in a bored voice. He let out a small sigh looking up at her. "If I have to go you have to go."

"But mike said you were excited," she whined.

"Umm no," he said raising in eyebrows, "They only thinking I am. It's called acting you should try it sometime."

"I'd rather not," she tried to massage her forehead. "I just, don't want to go." She flopped her back onto the floor looking up at the ceiling in dismay.

"Don't want to go where?" Hopper poked his head into the living room. "Dinners ready by the way." El and Will scrambled off the floor, moving down the hallway with Hopper to the kitchen.

"Max is having us over this weekend," Will said as they moved into the kitchen, Will's mom placing all four plates on the small square table. "El doesn't want to spend time with us though." She thought about the lie Mike had said about the party. Now she wouldn't have to explain why Will was going and she wasn't.

"That's not true," she said taking her seat, Will sitting across from her. "There is nothing wrong with have me time." Hopper nods his head with a smile.

"Is Mike going to be at this get together?" Hopper asked while everyone rolled their eyes at the comment.

"Well," Will began. "He's kind of part of the party, so I would assume yes." Hopper sighed picking up his fork and stabbing the slice ham a little hard then he needed to. "But don't worry Hop," Will continued, "I'll be there to make sure Mike doesn't do anything stupid." El looked up at him stabbing her ham just like Hopper. Like father and daughter, they ate their meal in silence listening to Will and Joyce talk about his college admittance.

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It was Friday, which meant El had twenty four hours to decide what she was going to do. Max had poured so many duties onto the guys, what to bring, who to ask for certain things so they don't get in trouble, and what kind of music to mix together on a tape. She let El off on something simple; *just bring yourself*. El could feel her stomach turn in guilt. How could she say no to her, she was working so hard to make them cool, to make them liked that El felt bad for flaking at last minute.

"Hey," El felt a small paper ball hit her left shoulder; she turned

slightly in her raised seat. They were doing physics examples, the class quietly working together with their partners. Dustin sat next to her, turning to where ever the paper ball had come from. Braydon smiled from across the room. "You going to be at the party tomorrow?" he asked her. El looked around, making sure he wasn't talking to anyone else.

Braydon was popular, and from what El could remember he tried to beat up Lucas a year ago for accidentally throwing a football into his face during football try outs. Dustin looked at her with confusion, waiting to see what she was going to do.

"Sure," she said slightly. She turned back to her work, slowly looking a Dustin.

"Then maybe we'll bump into each other," El looked back to Braydon, a smirk on his face as he gave her small wink; going back to his work. She quickly looked at Dustin, his eyes wide.

"What was that," he whispered. She shrugged her shoulders, her stomach twisting into more of a knot. She stared down at her physics equations, not knowing what he meant, or what she was going to do.

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"Dude," Dustin said as they got out of ear shot of Braydon. They walked down the hall towards the school parking lot. "That's like a date, he was asking you out. He wants to get with you at the party." El frowned and groaned in agony at his words. "Dude Braydon Crawford is going to be at the party," he said in amazement. "That means the entire football team will be there, which means cheerleaders are going to be there, and that means all the cool hot friends of the cheerleaders are going to be there."

"Dustin shut up," El said threw her teeth.

"Oh my god," Dustin continued. "Mike is going to be so pissed. You know how he gets, he's going to let it bubble and then he'll lash out like a small child wanting candy."

"Dustin," El said grabbing his arm. "Please stop talking." He looked

over to El his face in concern. They walked to the parking lot in silence; Lucas, Max, and Mike sitting by the old beat up minivan that Dustin inherited.

"Where's Will," Max asked, everyone turning their attention to them two, as Dustin pulled his keys from his bag.

"He had a doctor's appointment," everyone nodded their heads in silence. They all knew what that meant. He was in Indianapolis, talking to Doctor Owens today.

"Did he see something?" Lucas asked, sliding the back door open, letting max in first. El shook her head, picturing Will and his mom getting into the car that morning. His anxiety had started up again and he didn't know why. He hadn't been seeing anything, but he felt as if something was watching him; something was looking over his shoulder.

El stood by the van, watching Lucas and max find their seats before she got in. Mike kissed her head before sitting in the front with Dustin; Dustin putting his key into the ignition. EL sat in the last row of seats, throwing an open bag of chips onto the floor, dusting the seat off with a sigh.

"Braydon confronted El in physics about the party." El's heart skipped a beat.

"What did he say," Max said turning to look at her. She could see Mike looking through the rearview mirror at her.

"Who cares," Lucas grumbled. "He's an asshole." Max slapped his arm to make him shut up.

"It was nothing," EL said lightly putting her seat belt on. She made no eye contact with anyone playing with the hem of her shirt. She finally looked up, everyone didn't move; just staring at her. "Really," she said with a little more strength in her voice. "It was nothing."

"That's not what I saw," Dustin said, turning back to the front and putting the van into reverse.

"What do you mean?" Mike asked Dustin. El sighed praying that for

once Dustin didn't say anything.

"All I have to say is that your eyes better be locked on her, because Brayden wants of piece of her as well."

"What!" everyone said in unison?

"Dustin," El yelled. She put her head in her hands, felling the van grow way hotter than it was before. She could feel the anger coming off of Mike without even looking at him. Max tried to hide her giggles.

"Looks like you have some competition Wheeler," she said. This time it was Lucas's turn to smack her on the arm. "What?" she said loudly. "We all knew it was going to happen eventually. She's hot, what do you expect Mike?" El finally looked up from her hands. The car sat in silence, Mike looking out his window. "All I have to say is that if I were a girl,"

"Max," El grumbled. "Just please, let's talk about something else. I don't want to think of what Braydon thinks of me." Max carried the conversation to the party, asking if everyone had everything needed. Mike talking only once to say, yes he got some wine coolers from Nancy, and that he was now in her life debt.

El was the first to get dropped off because of how far she lived. She crawled out of the back seat, sliding the van door closed. Mike rolled down his window.

"I'll call you later okay," he said to her. A chorus of *awws* erupted from the car. El gave a minor smile before making her way to the house, letting out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

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"I've decided that maybe it's a good idea that you didn't go," Mike said through the phone. El rolled her eyes, bouncing down on her bed.

"*You've* decided," she said with slight ice in her voice.

"I mean, what if something does happen? What if you stress out and

destroy all the light bulbs or something." El let him ramble about all possible things that could trigger her, how the crowd might make her claustrophobia kick in. "I just don't want you to stress out about something that you didn't even want to do in the first place." El controlled her breathing, almost feeling a slight anger bubble in her. He didn't trust her with Braydon being there.

"Is this because of Braydon?" she asked standing with haste. "I can take care of him myself you know? You don't have to worry about me." There was silence over the phone.

"El, I know you can take care of yourself." She listened as he huffed into the phone, looking for the right words. "I, I really don't like the idea of him being near you. What if I have to help Max with something? What if something happens to the radio and they need me to fix it? What if we get lost in the crowd and I can't find you."

"It's no like Max lives in a mansion," she said, anger raising in her voice. "I'm fully capable of taking care of situation like this you know? I'm not eleven anymore, I can pick up on social cues and handle them on my own, I don't need you to hold my hand through it."

"I know you don't!" Mike yelled back.

"Then what's the issue?" they both sat in silence, waiting for the other to talk. Mike and El didn't argue often, but when they did they were both prone to yelling rather than talking it out.

"I thought you didn't want to go to this stupid party anyway," he said in a low tone. She didn't want to go to the stupid party, but the angrier she got, the more she wanted to prove to Mike that she could do it. There was nothing wrong with other boys liking her; she would take care of that on her own because she would never choose them over Mike.

"Well now I want to go," She said with attitude. "I'm sorry you can't trust me Mike, I guess I'll just see you there." She hung the phone up before he could get another word in; placing it back onto its receiver. She sprawled across the bed, grabbing her pillow and screaming into it in irritation.

"So dramatic," Will's voice said from her door way.

"Leave me to wallow," She said looking up at the glow in the dark stares Mike had placed on her ceiling.

"What kind of brotherly figure would I be if I let you wallow without annoying you first?"

"The good kind," she said, throwing her pillow back from where she got it. She sat up, looking at Will as he came and sat next to her, his back against her bed frame. "Mike and I got in an argument."

"What did he say this time?" Will asked.

"He's mad because Braydon Crawford wants to see me at the party," She watched as Wills eyebrows rise high. "It's not like I was the one to wink my eye and shoot him figure guns in confirmation. I didn't even say I wanted to see him too, I just turned away. It's not that big of a deal."

"I mean," Will perched his lips in thought. "Mike has always been insecure. You know he has. Remember when you dance with Dustin as homecoming last year, I thought Mike was going to pumble him to the ground." El rolled her eyes at the thought.

"He can get over it," El said standing and moving to her closet. "I love Mike, but if he's going to be a jerk then he can go somewhere else because I'm going to do what I want." She looked through her clothes, looking for the green dress she hadn't worn yet. She was waiting on a special occasion. She pulled it out of her closet, the skirt of the dress puffing out a bit. Max said the color would go great with her dark hair, the curls finally long enough to go past the middle of her back.

"Please, just don't do something that would make him upset, and I don't mean mad, I mean hurt." He got up from the bed, walking out of her room and to his own. She didn't want to hurt Mike; she just wanted to show him that she could do this. She could get through a normal teenage party; she could be a big girl without anyone's help.

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Saturday night; El looked at herself in the mirror, Wills music

blasting from his room as he got ready. She thought about boots for her dress, but put on her usual Chucks thinking about how her feet would feel by the end of the night. She put Hopper's bracelet over her wrist, the tattoo hidden safely behind the blue hair ties. She messed with her hair a little bit, moving it from one side to the other before giving up and walking out of her room.

"Let's go!" she yelled over Wills music as she banged on his door. "I want to get this over with!" Will open his door; his eyes looking slightly tired, and his brother's leather jacket in hand. Will decided to go with a look a seldom used; a white shirt, fitted jeans, and boots. "Bitchin'" El said with a smile.

They left quickly, Will's mom letting him barrow the car for the night. They didn't want their parents to see what they were wearing. Neither of them where ones to dress up for anything, and Hopper was the type of man to ask questions.

"We'll be fine," Will said through a breath. He sighed, pulling up to Max's house; cars lining the street. "It's going to fine," he said again, not to her but himself.

"It's going to be fine," she said to him with a smile. "We can do this Will," She grabbed his hand and squeezed it before opening her door, her heart picking up speed as they made their way up the side walk, and to the house.

They didn't bother knocking, the music was too loud. Will couldn't even open it all the way, people sanding in almost every space that was available. They squeezed through the crowd to the kitchen, Will grabbing her hand to make sure they didn't lose each other.

"Guys!" she heard Max's voice over the loud music and talking. Max stood on a chair in the kitchen, a red solo cup in hand. She could see the parties' heads around her, Mike standing slightly taller than everyone else. She felt nerve's jump all around her body; he hadn't noticed that they were there yet.

She gripped Will's hand a little tighter, feeling someone else grabbing her free one. She jumped slightly at the sensation, her mind immediately going to Mike before realizing it wasn't him. Will

stopped with her, both of them looking back at Braydon, and smug smirk on his face.

"You look beautiful tonight," he yelled over the noise. El felt herself freeze, what was she supposed to say?

"Yeah she does," she heard Will say. He grabbed her hand out of Brayden's, pulling her away from him. "We have some where to be," Will started dragging her through the crowed again, he heart picking up pace. "Maybe you should try saying something next time," he said to her. "If it were Mike he would have flipped shit by your reaction. You looked like a scared puppy."

"I did not!" she yelled before they made it to their friends.

"Byers!" Dustin yelled, hugging him in a tight grip. "Hopper!" he said with the same enthusiasm picking her up in a bear hug. He smelled like the beer Hopper drank, making her want to gag.

"Dustin," She yelled her eyes wide as he almost threw her back onto the ground. Mike steady her from behind as she slightly swayed, looking for her footing. She looked up at him, his eyes glaring into Dustin.

"You okay," Mike asked looking down at her with sad eyes. She could see the guilt from what was said the night before. Before she could get one word out Will interrupted.

"We had a run in with Brayden," El spun her head around at Will, her eyes piercing him to death. "But, it was nothing." He said quickly. She could feel Mike grip her arm a little tighter.

"It was nothing," She yelled at everyone. Max stepped down from her chair with a smile.

"You want a drink!" she yelled at her holding up her cup.

El threw her hand up in the air with a smile, "Why not," she yelled over everyone.

"What about you lover boy," Max yelled at Mike from behind her.

"Nothing for me," he said as Max moved to the counter. El moved slightly away from Mike, remembering that she was a little mad at him. She looked around at the crowd, everyone slightly towering over her. She looked to the front of the house where her eyes locked with Brayden for half a second, him and the larger side of the football team stood by the speaker. His friends clapped him on the back to get his attention.

Dustin and Lucas yelled at one another through the noise, playing thumb war with one hand with a drink in another. Finally her eyes landed on Mike, he had been watching her calmly.

"You okay," he said bending his head to get closer to her ear. "Do you feel alright?" She rolled her eyes.

"I'm fine Mike," He bit his lip in hesitation. "I'm a big girl remember?"

"Yeah," he said, leaning against the wall; the guilt leaving his eyes. They glared at one another, neither moving.

"Okay," Max placed the drink in front of El's face, until she grabbed a hold of it. "I think you'll like it. It taste like Kool-Aid but it is way more than that." El looked down into the cup, then up at Mike.

"I don't think..." before he could get another word out she threw the drink back, gulping down every drop. Mike and Max just stared at her as she looked down; the Kool-Aid gone.

"I think I'm going to get more," she said point with her thumb over her shoulder. She left them standing there, dazed. She had alcohol a few times before. When she had first moved in with the Byers; her and Will had gotten into their parents secret stash, drinking so much they both threw up. They swore they would never tell anyone.

She looked down at the punch bowl, feeling herself warm up in a good way. Her muscles relaxed slightly and she let her breath out with ease. She was tired of being so tense all the time, she wanted this party to be like the movies. She wanted it to be like the party in Sixteen Candles, where she was just at Jake Ryan's party, not giving a care about anything other than having fun. No bad men, no danger of using her powers, no one looking at her like she was a lost puppy.

"Have a sweet tooth?" Ell jumped at the voice. Brayden stood right next to her as she looked down at the bowl. "Not a big punch fan myself, I like to stick to beer." El hated beer. She had tried it at the cabin years ago, when she thought it was just a soda; spitting it out in discussed.

"Beers gross," she said shyly, pooling the red punch into her cup. El raised it up at him in a goodbye, backing away. He grabbed her waist gently; her heart stopping.

"I thought maybe you would want to come hang out with me," he grinned down at her, his teeth so straight and white. Her mouth became dry, unable to form the correct words in her mouth. She could do this; she was capable of doing this, at least that what she had told Mike last night.

"No," she surprised herself. "I came here with my boyfriend."

"Who? Zombie boy? That's your boyfriend?"

"Gross, no. He's like my brother." she said scrunching her forehead. "Mike," he looked at her in confusion. "Mike Wheeler?" He looked around the crowd in a state of disbelief.

"Wait," he took his hand off her waste. "You're going with that AV club nerd?" She could feel anger burning through her skin. "That's not possible," he laughed. She slowly backed away, feeling a growl roll through her throat. "Hey," he yelled as she started to make her way back to her friends. "You know, girls don't turn me down." She turned to yell at him, instead he ran into her as she stopped. His body weight cause her to be knocked over, making her fall to the ground, the punch going all over her dress.

"Hey," Mike yell was loud enough to make the people around them go silent. El could feel her cheeks redden as she saw Mikes shoes come into view; he helped her off the floor. "Beat it Crawford, she clearly doesn't want you around." Everyone was watching, their eyes on her, their eyes on Mike.

"She can speak for herself dweeb." Brayden said. El gulped, smelling the surgery alcohol on her clothes.

"You should get used to rejection Brayden," she said. The crowd yelled "oh!" as Brayden glared at them; backing away.

"Let's get cleaned up," Mike said as people went back to their conversations. He led El down the hall to the bath room; shutting and locking the door. Mike turned the facet onto warm water; El sat up on the bathroom counter with a frown. "Luckily the dress just looks wet so I highly doubt there will be no stains.

El looked down at her dress. Her knee looked like it might bruise over, the palms of her hands still hurt from slamming onto the tile floor.

"You didn't have to rescue me," she said letting out a sigh. "I'm sorry if that sounds mean, I'm just tired of everyone thinking I can't handle it." Mike leant on the counter next to her, putting his hand on her hurt knee.

"I want to help El," He said testing the water to see if it was warm. He grabbed a small towel from the cabinet. "I just want to be there for you, that doesn't mean I don't think you can't do it yourself." He grabbed the soap; letting the towel grow bubbles in the water. He applied it to the top of her dress, being careful not to touch her skin. She watched as he carefully washed all the Kool-Aid out, drying it as he went.

"Why don't you want Brayden to talk to me?" He was silent for a moment, just focusing on what he was doing.

"I don't care who you talk to, I just know what guys like that say behind closed doors."

"And what do they say?" she pulled his chin up to look at her, feeling guilt for how she had treated him before.

"Nasty thing," he said throwing the towel in the sink. "I don't want you to get hurt. I don't want to lose you, and sometimes all I can think about is that year, that year you were gone and I didn't know. I don't want to live like that again." She tilted her head to his, even while sitting on the counter he towered over her; their lips meeting half way. She let the kiss carry her away, the party drifting to the far

back of her mind as she felt his lips warm hers. They leaned their foreheads against one another.

"I promise I'm not going anywhere," she said. They gave each other a smile; Mike helped her down from the counter. "I'm sorry I got mad at you. This whole thing just stressed me out, and then you got mad over Brayden and I felt like you didn't trust me. I thought I was capable of handling myself and then in my head I thought you were mad at me, when really you weren't mad at all. I was the one to initiate the anger..."

"Hey," Mike said with a laugh, "Calm down short fry; the Kool-Aids getting to your head." She playfully glared at his comment. "I just don't think I was mentally prepared to hear that someone else wanted you." He grabbed her hips, pulling her closer. He moved his head down to hers, her heart moving fast with the rhythm of the music, before a pounding on the door made them pull apart.

"El," Will's voice yelled from the other side of the door. Mike moved, unlocking the door; looking at his best friend with a little disappointment. "Sorry," he said grinning. "I promised Hopper I would keep an eye on you Wheeler."

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El danced with Max and Will, spinning and laughing as Madonna blasted through their ears. The guys sat against the wall, laughing with each other, Mike glancing up at her every once and a while. She hadn't had this kind of fun, the freedom to dance and laugh; the feeling of alcohol holding a warm blanket over her. As the song ended the three came back to their original spot, Max moving through the crowd to make sure nothing was getting broken or ruined.

"So," Lucas said to Will, "How was the doctors yesterday Will?" El could see Will go completely still, the blood draining from his face. She looked up at Mike who glanced down at her.

"It was fine," Will said in a rush. "Nothing out of the ordinary. I mean, I just go because my mom thinks I need to talk to someone." All four of them watched as he looked around them, grabbing a random cup

from the table. "I'm going to grab another drink, you guys want anything?" They shook their heads, but weren't fast enough to answer as he scurried away from them.

"Well that was weird," Dustin said taking a swig of his beer.

"Has he been acting weird at home," Mike asked her. All their eyes watched as she thought about the past week. Everything seemed to be in order, nothing out of the ordinary. *It's called acting*, he had said, *you should try it sometime*.

"No," she said looking at her friends. "He's been the same as he always is. Maybe just a little more stressed with sending in his drawings to New York." Everyone nodded, Mike letting out a sigh. *It's nothing to be worried about*, she said to herself; watching people dancing throughout the house. Brayden's eyes watching her from the front of the living room. She dropped her gaze, *it's nothing to be worried about*, she thought again.